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ABSTRACT

The document examines the connection of commitment and dedication to excellence in teaching, and the extent to which their intensity can be measured as variables. The study expands the knowledge base of 19th and early 20th century teaching by discovering and documenting examples in the historical literature of dedication and commitment. The connection of commitment and dedication to teaching excellence today and in the recent past as evidenced in the lives of Vermont teachers is identified. A description of dedication and commitment in a population of Vermont teachers in the 100-year period from 1830 to 1930. Findings indicate that these qualities would be most evident not only in rural settings but also in rural settings where economic rewards were below average. Teachers in the sample spend a significant amount of time in school and are involved in school-related activities beyond the context of the work day. Teachers responded that they were spending their own money on their classes or their students. (79 references) (SI)

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DEDICATION/COMMITMENT: A STUDY OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Work in Progress

Initial Results of Doctoral Dissertation Research

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John Duval

University of Vermont

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE NERO CONFERENCE

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INTRODUCTION

This study may be said to have its genesis in the Hawaiian Islands on the island of Kauai in the middle of the last century. Abner Wilcox, an American missionary, took his family from Oahu to Kauai to start a school and continue a mission. As part of the ritual of leaving Oahu, Wilcox is reported to have left specific instructions with the assistants he was leaving behind:

> With the native teachers of his outlying schools Abner lingered longest. They were young men, all barefooted but wearing trousers and shirts as their marks of achievement. I leave the work in your hands, Abner told them with his first show of emotion. "He has said go he and teach all nations. The people are thirsty for your knowledge! It is through you that this nation shall rise to greatness. I know you are badly paid and overworked, my friends. But this has forever been the lot of teachers. I go with sadness. May we meet again in the Kingdom of Heaven." (Krauss, 76, p. 9)

Abner and his family built the first school on Kauai and started Grove Farm Plantation, one of the most successful sugar plantations in the Hawaiian Islands.

> His salary from the mission was $450.00 per year. For each child he received an allowance of $30.00 for a total income of $600.00. Out of that he fed and clothed his family, kept his horses and other livestock, subscribed to magazines, and bought

> the books for his library which was Abner's most prized possession. In addition, he was constantly out of pocket for repairs to the house and the school. There was also the considerable cost of denim he bought every year to make shirts and pants for students who couldn't afford them. (Krauss, 76, p. 26)

The history of the European and American missionary movement is replete with such accounts. Tales of people continuing their mission in spite of great adversity are common. And there is an intermingling of what would today be secular teaching along with spreading the word of God. Central to eighteenth and nineteenth century protestant missionary efforts was the need for converts to be able to read scripture and prayer books and sing hymns.

As illustrated in the early protestant missionary efforts, significant commitment was essential in accomplishing their purposes. The experience of early missionaries may serve as an analog to what is required of present day public school teachers. Teachers today often find themselves confronting very challenging work conditions with moderate compensation and a modicum of public support.

As this study will demonstrate, commitment and dedication are terms found in a wide variety of literature related to education. Research into their meaning, how they operate, what, if any, connection exists to excellence in teaching, and the extent to which, as variables, their intensity can be measured is scarce. The purpose of the proposed

research is to contribute to an understanding of these attributes in hopes of making them more useful descriptors of teaching.

DEDICATION/COMMITMENT: A STUDY OF THEIR
RELATIONSHIP TO TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Significance of the Study

The 1980's has been a decade of intense interest in American public education at all governmental levels. The ability, preparation and performance of American public school teachers have become the foci of prolonged and intense inquiry. Emerging from the "reform literature" are two descriptors of teaching excellence linked operationally but only superficially defined and described: dedication and commitment.

Purpose of the Study

This study is concerned with the terms dedication and commitment, what they mean, how they are related, and to what extent they inform the research on teaching excellence across time. As a descriptive study, this work will endeavor to:

1. Expand the knowledge base of 19th and early 20th century teaching.

2. Discover and document examples in the historical literature of dedication and commitment.

3. Identify commitment and dedication today and in the recent past. What is the connection to teaching excellence as evidenced in the lives of Vermont teachers.

4. Develop a fuller expanded description of dedication and commitment in a population of Vermont teachers.

Major Research Questions

The major questions of this study are:

1. How are dedication and commitment described by those who write

about teaching or portray it in other ways.

2. How are these qualities described by teachers themselves across time.

3. How do commitment and dedication operationally link to teacher professionalism and teaching excellence.

The Literature

The literature of this study falls into three major categories. There are historical documents made up largely of letters, diaries and associated records of the 19th century and early 20th century Vermont teachers. In addition, there are two early educational histories of Vermont which place these diaries and assorted primary resources into a useable context. The second category provides detailed psychological studies of commitment, usually treating it as a research variable and attempting to describe ways to measure it. The third group of readings comes from the current research about teaching. This category also includes popular literature made up of quotes, opinions, newspaper reports and advertisements, television programs, movies, etc. which deal in some way with teaching and from which information about commitment and education can be drawn.

In his book, How Teachers Taught, Larry Cuban, Professor of Education at Stanford, in describing an exemplary rural teacher who had made out-of-pocket purchases for materials and committed sizable blocks of discretionary time to doing her job better, said:

> A third explanation of the constancy of teacher centered instruction concentrates on the occupational ethos or culture of teaching that breeds conservatism and

> resistance to change in instructional practice. This conservatism, i.e., preference for stability and caution towards change is rooted in the people recruited into the profession, how they are formally socialized, and the school culture of which teaching itself is a primary ingredient. Persons attached to the classroom see contact with children, appreciate the flexible work schedule and, while acknowledging the limited financial rewards, still embrace the service mission of teaching. (Cuban, 1984)

Other research has shown that the notion of teacher as a provider of a necessary service is one which is very persistent in the literature across time.

Adding to the information on commitment is the data base drawing from research into rural schools and rural education. Rurality is often associated with remoteness, loneliness, scarcity or lack of opportunity and other resources. Mathis and Carlson (1987) found that schools experiencing great difficulty in securing and retaining qualified and well trained teachers are those located in isolated communities of less than 2500 inhabitants. In a state such as Vermont, this type of community makes up more than half the organized towns and cities in the state.

> A climate of commitment and professionalism should not be a matter of theory but a practice attained by ordinary people through recognition and the importance of creating a supportive environment for the professional growth of teachers. It is a worthy goal of all school systems but a must for the rural systems. (Mathis and Carlson, 1987)

The author suggests that due to a scarcity of resources, including a lower pay scale, rural school systems might in particular be looking for signs of commitment and dedication in prospective teachers.

A different view of commitment and yet one which compliments the objectives of this study can be found in literature which deals with industry in business. Robert Kuhn of M.I.T. and George Thomas Griese of Harvard say:

> What we learn from religion we apply to business. How we ask incorporations includes the dedication of employees and executives. How can employee dedication be increased and therefore company productivity be increased. We believe that life with an organization, any organization, has spiritual overtones, that there is critical linkage between personal meaning and company mission, that it is this firm bond that becomes our working definition of commitment. True commitment thrives independent of external results. We propose a structural definition. We define commitment as the link between personal meaning and organizational mission. Commitment is the emotional line of force that attracts individuals to institutions, the psychic energy that maintains physical presence and mental membership. Commitment can be described as a purpose with action, an internal compulsion of the individual to achieve an external objective of the group. Commitment signals emotional attachment. (Kuhn and Griese, 1984)

Carl Glickman of the University of Georgia writes about commitment in the context of a continuum. As a result of his work in developmental supervision, he has constructed a formula in which commitment equals concern plus time and energy and is conceived as a condition being more or less intense, depending on how far the individual is along the continuum. He postulates that teachers with a low level of commitment have little or no concern for students whereas teachers with a high level of concern for students and other teachers would be characteristic of someone with a high level of commitment. In a further refinement, he relates commitment to level of extraction. Here he speculates that the more abstract a teacher can be in describing their work or their profession, the more committed they are to their work and their profession. (Glickman, 1987)

Thus, a review of the literature found that commitment and dedication are terms widely used across time but not rigorously defined as they apply to teachers and teaching. Secondly, there is a need for a fuller description and more detailed explanation of where commitment or dedication exist and how they operate.

Methodology

One important underlying assumption in this study is that teachers of quality enter the profession and stay in the profession for reasons that have yet to be fully described. Perhaps commitment or dedication play a role. As a naturalistic study, the research is concerned with phenomena which take place over time, have a set of historical roots, and for which the data is made up largely of words. As a two-stage case study, the research seeks to look at teachers identified as committed or dedicated

Commitment Continuum

LOW

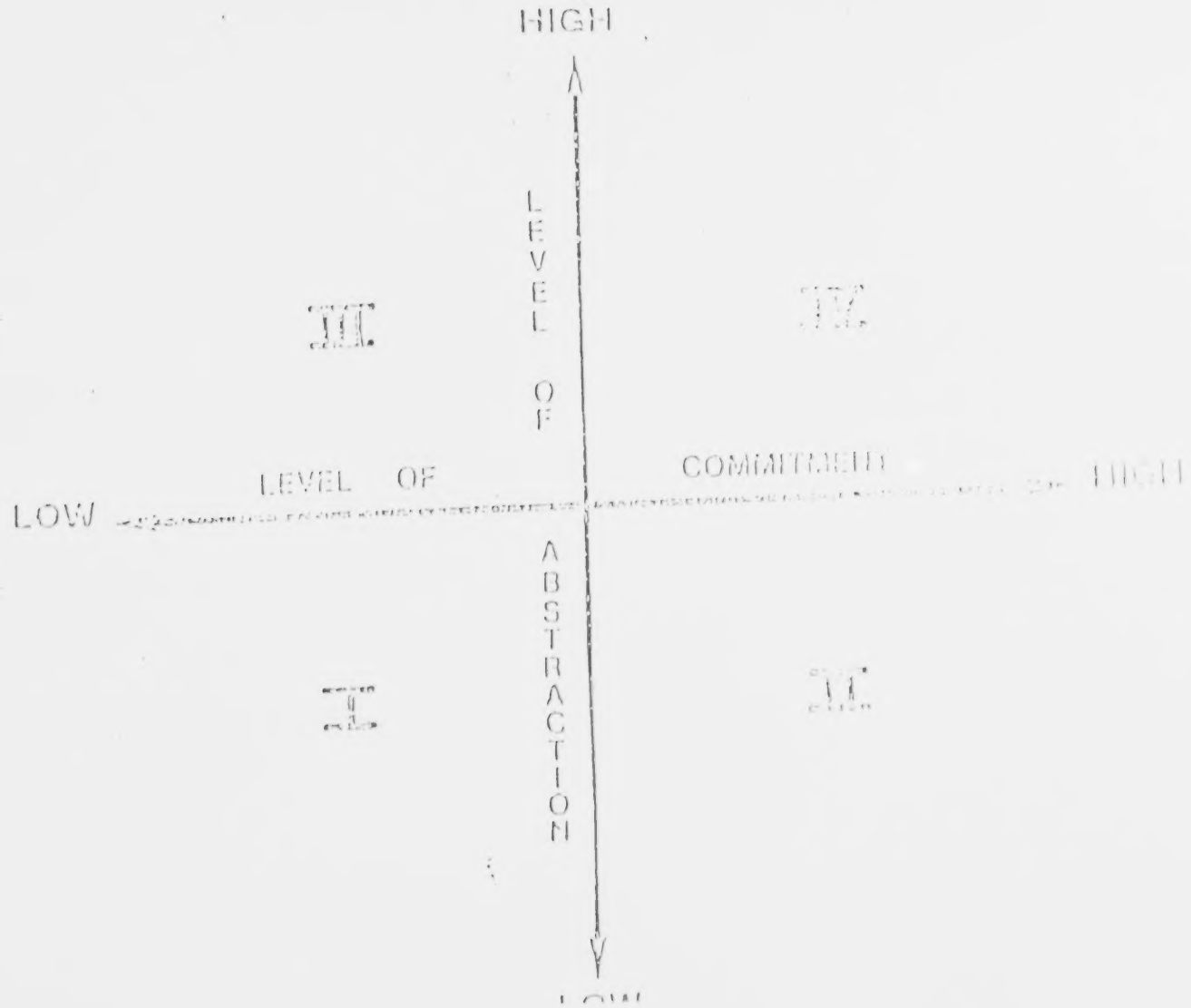
1) LITTLE CONCERN FOR STUDENTS
2) LITTLE TIME OR ENERGY EXPENDED
3) PRIMARY CONCERN WITH KEEPING ONE'S JOB

HIGH

1) HIGH CONCERN FOR STUDENTS AND OTHER TEACHERS
2) EXTRA TIME OR ENERGY EXPENDED
3) PRIMARY CONCERN WITH DOING MORE FOR OTHERS

Figure #1

CONCERN + TIME and ENERGY =
LEVEL OF COMMITMENT


HIGH
LEVEL OF ABSTRACTION
LEVEL OF COMMITMENT
LOW
III
IV
I
II

Levels of Abstract Thinking

Low	Moderate	High
◦CONFUSED ABOUT PROBLEM	◦CAN DEFINE THE PROBLEM	◦CAN THINK OF THE PROBLEM FROM MANY PERSPECTIVES
◦DON'T KNOW WHAT CAN BE DONE	◦CAN THINK OF ONE OR TWO POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO PROBLEM	◦CAN GENERATE MANY ALTERNATIVE PLANS
◦"SHOW ME"	◦HAS TROUBLE THINKING THROUGH A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN	◦CAN CHOOSE A PLAN AND THINK THROUGH EACH STEP
◦HAS ONE OR TWO HABITUAL RESPONSES TO PROBLEMS		

in various time zones or cells. To facilitate this purpose, a dedication/commitment profile was developed based on or grounded in the literature. In addition, a figure was developed called "The Excellent Teacher Universe." These devices along with the interview protocol developed by us allowed exploration into this area.

For a number of years the University of Vermont has held an Outstanding Teachers Day in October. The purpose has been to recognize teachers from various school districts in Vermont who have been nominated by their peers and administrators for the honor on the basis of their general teaching excellence and their commitment to education. Teachers from this group were purposefully selected to be interviewed. Selection was made with the help of the commitment/dedication profile as well as the biographical records available on each teacher and filed at the University of Vermont. Teachers were selected in part based on the length of time they had been in the profession and thus two teachers were chosen for each of six orbits of the universe beginning with the 1930's and continuing through the 1980's. One to two-hour interviews were scheduled with each of the twelve teachers selected. The interviews were transcribed; member checks were made with the twelve interviewees on points raised in their interviews which provided clarification and definement of the data and assisted in triangulation. At a point in the synthesis of the transcribed data, information was juxtaposed with the research done on the archival data from teaching anecdotes of the 19th century. This served to further refine and inform emerging concepts around dedication and commitment as they relate to teaching.

Among methods used during data analysis were constant comparison as described in Glaser and Strauss (1967) and generic theorizing as described

Figure #6

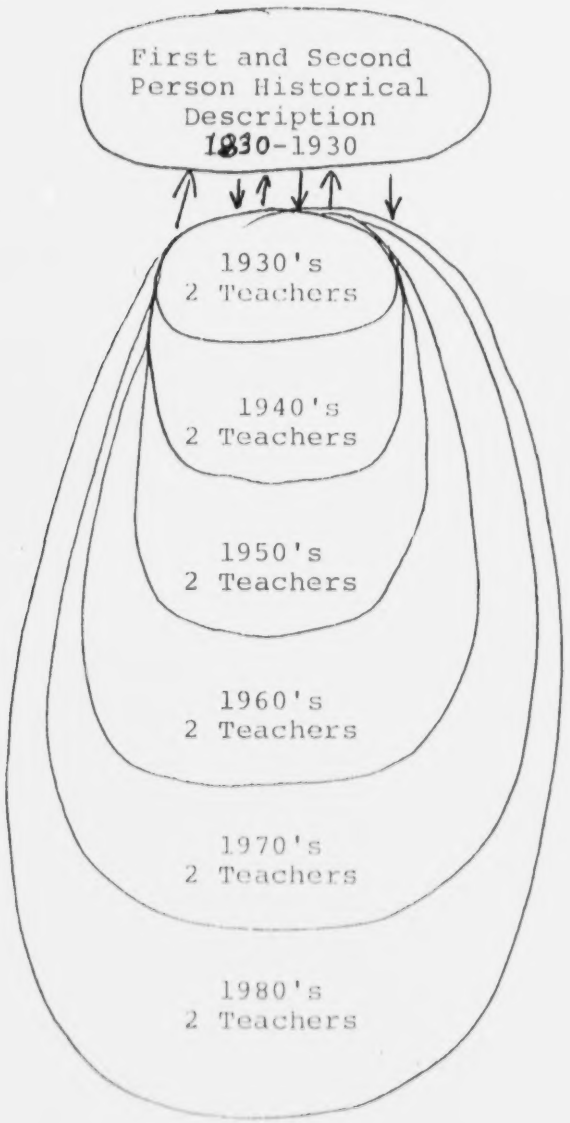
Dedication/Commitment Profile

Through a review of written descriptions of teachers and teaching, written or oral testimony, interviews, video tapes and other sources, it appears a committed or dedicated teacher:

1. might describe teaching in terms of a calling or mission (Teacher Talks, 1986)
2. would continue to teach as rewards diminish (At Risk, 1983)
3. would exhibit enthusiasm, devotion, service in the face of adversity, caring (Webster)
4. embraces the service mission of teaching (Cuban, 1984)
5. holds detailed, abstract concepts about teaching as a profession (Glickman, 1985)
6. can watch themselves as they teach or create a metacognition of teaching (Glickman, 1985)
7. can link their personal mission in life to that of the organization to which they belong (Kuhn & Griese, 1984)
8. expresses concern for fellow teachers and students (Glickman, 1985)
9. expends above average amounts of time and energy in their work (Glickman, 1985)

10. stays on the job in the absence of promotion, prestige, perks, power and pay (Rubin, 1987)
11. exhibits a sense of sacrifice of money or status (Yankelovich, 1981)
12. is recognized by peers and supervisors as being highly competent (Blanchard, 1986)
13. exhibits a willingness to reflect on own professional behavior and be analytical about their performance (Olson, 1987)

Figure #5: Excellent Teacher Universe



Explanation:

A total of (12) teachers will be selected and interviewed. Each will have been teaching in the decade he/she is chosen to represent. The Dedication/Commitment Profile will also be used to help sort subjects.

in Lincoln and Guba (1985). Theorizing is the process of discovering order and pattern so that data are meaningful, understandable, clearly presented and credible. (Patton, 1980) Categories in their properties are indicated by data. Conceptual abstractions emerge from the categories. What should emerge is a pictorial description illustrated by the data which allows the reader to grasp the picture in terms of his or her own experience.

Study Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

The outcomes of this study are yet to be determined. However, a number of areas of inquiry not within the bounds of this study may yield a richer description of teaching as a profession. These areas of inquiry include but are not limited to:

1. The relationship, if any, between commitment and dedication and the literature on effective teaching.

2. Expanded measures of commitment and dedication.

3. The potential for assessing predisposition towards commitment or dedication ~~and~~ IN pre-service ~~for~~ OR beginning teachers.

4. The extent to which professional commitment in teaching is similar to that found in other service professions.

5. The extent to which commitment or dedication can be enhanced or intensified in in-service or pre-service professionals through identifiable methods. (Joyce and Showers, 1984)

It is possible that aspects of teachers' beliefs, personal attributes, habits or practices share much in common. Perhaps a predisposition towards commitment or dedication can be engendered in members of the teaching profession. Perhaps knowledge of these variables will accumulate to the point that hiring procedures can be designed to identify prospective teachers

with a stong potential for being committed or dedicated to excellence in teaching. As indicated in the introduction, the purpose of this research is to make a contribution towards such increased understanding.

OUTSTANDING TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

As a former Outstanding Teacher for the State of Vermont representing your district, I have selected you and you have agreed to be part of an interview process which is allowing me to collect information regarding you and your colleagues. I am particularly interested in that portion of the selection criteria which deals with the notion of commitment and commitment to children. I want to thank you in advance for your participation in this project. I also would like you again to state for the record that this interview is of your own free will and accord and that you willingly agree to participate in this process. Furthermore, if so desired, I will provide you a written copy of your transcript. Also, as you know, your transcript will be assigned a code so that your name and identity and the identity of your school will be known only to the researcher.

1. What is your age?
2. What is your sex?
3. What is your race?
4. How many years have you spent in teaching?
5. How many years have you been teaching in this district?
6. What is the lowest salary you ever made as a teacher?
7. What is the highest salary you ever made as a teacher?
8. What is the current length of your contract in days?
9. You were selected in _____ as the Outstanding Teacher of the Year in your district. One of the criteria for selection was evidence of commitment. The words commitment and dedication

are often used by people to describe teachers whom they respect and admire. What do these terms mean to you? Why do you think they might be used to describe teachers whom other people admired?

10. The 1985 Teacher of the Year group had an opportunity to participate in a series of roundtables devoted to discussion of teaching in the '80s. A monograph called Teacher Talks was published. A theme reportedly emerged from these discussions describing teaching as a "calling." To what extent do you see teaching as a mission or a calling?
11. What are the attributes or qualities you feel an effective or successful teacher must have?
12. Do you see yourself as an effective teacher?
13. How important do you feel being committed or dedicated is to your success as a teacher?
14. Can you provide some examples of commitment or dedication? Can you identify others who exhibit commitment or dedication, such as current or former colleagues and perhaps former teachers of yours.
15. Did you always want to be a teacher?
16. Was there a former teacher in your past who inspired you to become a teacher, and if so, how did that teacher behave as a teacher?
17. Did you or do you ever spend your own money on your students? Can you give examples?
18. On average, how much time do you spend per week in work related to teaching. When does the school day begin and end for you?

19. Within the framework of your teaching contract, how many days have you been absent from your teaching responsibilities in the last five years for sickness, professional development, personal leave, or other?

20. How would you compare your current level of enthusiasm for your job with the other years you have been teaching?

INITIAL CONCLUSIONS OR RESULTS

Data collection related to this project has been going on for several years. Data comes principally from three sources. The first source is the literature used in this study, focusing on teaching both as it is practiced now and in the past. Literature includes not only printed material but film, video and other media. The second major source of data is the reservoir of diaries, letters, journals, and other like material housed in the collections of the University of Vermont and the Vermont Historical Society in Montpelier, Vermont. These documents provide a glimpse of teaching in Vermont in the 100 year period from 1830 to 1930. The third major source of data is the collection of interviews completed by this researcher during the past year.

A purposeful sample of Vermont teachers was selected to be interviewed as the final stage in data collection for this study. The population selected is that group of teachers who collectively make up the Outstanding Teachers in Vermont chosen each year by the University of Vermont from 1981 through 1988. Thus, the population consisted of 743 possible subjects. A sample of twelve teachers was drawn from this population purposefully to provide an indepth look at dedicated and committed teachers. A number of filters were developed to aid in the selection. First, a model was developed called The Excellent Teacher Universe. Beginning with the decade between 1930 and 1940 and extending into the 1980's, two subjects were assigned to each of these orbits. The intention was to interview two teachers who had taught actively in Vermont

schools during each decade from the 1930's through the 1980's. It was further determined that the sample should accurately represent the population of Vermont teachers in terms of gender and other criteria. Thus, eight of the teachers were to be female and four male. Since there are currently 6,656 public school teachers in the State of Vermont K-12, almost equally divided between elementary and secondary school, it was further determined that six of the teachers would be elementary teachers and six secondary teachers.

The literature on dedication and commitment strongly suggested that these qualities would be most evident not only in rural settings but also in rural settings where economic rewards were below average. Since Vermont is the most rural state in the nation, the first filter was established automatically. As a second filter, teachers were selected only from those districts where the average teacher salary was below the state mean salary for 1986. A third filter was developed by selecting teachers who worked in districts where the average per pupil expenditure was below the state mean average per pupil expenditure for 1986. As a third measure or fourth filter for narrowing the field, statistics related to the number of students in each district receiving free and reduced hot lunch were secured, an average for the state arrived at, that is, an arithmatic mean, and teachers selected whose school districts exceeded that average. In this way, it was thought the intensity of dedication and commitment might be enhanced. Lastly, as a way of helping the selection process for the sample, particular attention was paid to the section on the nomination form which all candidates

file with the University of Vermont that refers to community activities and service to the community outside of school. It was postulated that this would give evidence of teachers more service conscious than others.

To date, eight of the twelve interviews have been completed. All the interviews have been coded and tape recorded. All the tapes have been transcribed. Transcriptions averaged 30 to 35 pages, double spaced, typewritten. It was determined that data analysis would not take place in earnest until all the transcripts were available. However, researcher recollections from the interviews and field notes taken as a back-up to the tapes, have surfaced more than one interesting theme or early conclusion.

It appears that teachers in the sample spend significant amounts of time in school and involved in school related activities beyond the context of the work day as defined by their master contract or by convention in those districts where a master contract is not in place. It is not unusual, it appears, for committed or dedicated teachers to spend in excess of 50% "overtime" in pursuit of their profession. The teachers in the sample thus far collected have described work weeks as long as eighty hours plus.

Another theme relates to the expenditure of personal wealth. Every teacher thus far interviewed responded that they were spending money of their own on their classes or their students. Probes showed that these sums were several hundreds of dollars a year per respondent. It strikes this researcher that in light of traditionally low salaries and the low economic status often accorded teaching as

a career, this may prove to be one of the more significant findings and may very well require and warrant significant additional research.

All the respondents interviewed to date speak with emotion and feeling about teaching as an affair of the heart as well as the mind. It has not been unusual for the intensity of responses to cause a voice to tremble and quaver. As was found during the intensive interviews of the 1985 Teacher of the Year group, there is a shared sense of teaching as a calling and teaching as a mission. Those respondents who spoke at greatest length about this also were often able to recall significant experiences from their childhood as it related to teachers who they remembered and there may be a connection between early strong models and the inculcation or development of this attitude or value.

Lastly, although limited in scope, this research has thus far served to reinforce a not uncommon feeling that descriptions of effective teachers and teaching are at best, thus far, partial. Much additional research remains to be done in this area in order that the grand schemes for teacher improvement of this decade and the future can be more appropriately focused.

TO BE RETURNED TO DEAN RATHS BY JUNE 10, 1988

OUTSTANDING TEACHER BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Teacher's Name: _____ Phone: _____
Home Address: _____

Name of School: _____ Phone: _____
School Address: _____

Name of School District: _____ Phone: _____
School District Address: _____

Education:

College	Degree	Date

Teaching History:

Date	School	Grades	Courses

Awards and Honors:

Service Activities:

Community Activities:

Personal Interests:

Other:

Figure 4: FORMS OF TEACHER COMMITMENT

	VOCATIONAL		PROFESSIONAL		INSTRUMENTAL
	Education	Subject	Teaching	Institution	Career
Core					
Mixed					
Peripheral					

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